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## Religion in the Third Reich

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# Religion in the Third Reich

BY MILDRED S. WERTHEIMER

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DURING the three years which have elapsed since Hitler's accession to power in Germany, the National Socialists have established a totalitarian state in which all organized political opposition has been completely eradicated. The state is absolute, controlling every phase of German life. In eliminating political parties and trade unions and coordinating all cultural and social groups with National Socialism, the Nazis encountered little or no opposition. The first real resistance to domination by the state arose with respect to Nazification of the Evangelical church.<sup>1</sup> With the consolidation of Nazi power, however, it became clear that National Socialism is an ideology or *Weltanschauung* which must itself be regarded as a religion. In its propagation of extreme nationalism—as expressed by the Nazi conceptions of blood (race), soil and honor and its glorification of the state—National Socialism is considered by leading theologians, both in Germany and abroad, as fundamentally irreconcilable with the tenets of Christianity, either Catholic or Protestant. Thus the present religious struggle in the Reich is a conflict between opposing religions and a battle for control of the German conscience.

The major religious affiliations of the German people since the Reformation have been Evangelical (Lutheran-Reformed) and Roman Catholic, the former predominating in the north of Germany and the latter in the south and west. According to the 1925 census, 40 million Germans professed Lutheranism and 20 million, Roman Catholicism.<sup>2</sup> Before the revolution of 1918, the Lutheran churches had been state institutions under control of the separate German kings, princes and dukes. Even after the unification of Germany in 1871 there was no Reich church and little change in

church administration.<sup>3</sup> The reorganization of the Lutheran church which followed establishment of the Weimar Republic did not radically alter its form. The church had derived its governing power from the state, and continued to do so under the Weimar constitution. That instrument,<sup>4</sup> however, recognized the separation of church and state, providing that "there is no state church." Nevertheless, a complete divorce of church and state did not take place, although there was less state supervision and for the first time the church was independent of political interference. In administrative matters the church remained essentially decentralized along territorial lines. In 1922 the 28 territorial churches organized a union—the German Evangelical Church Federation—which somewhat unified them. The emphasis, however, remained on autonomy of these territorial districts, which continued to be the basic units of church government.

The ethic of Lutheranism provides an important explanation of the respect for authority and discipline which has made the Germans splendid followers but poor individual leaders. It accounts in part for the failure of democracy in the Reich and the rise of National Socialism, as well as for the passive attitude of the Lutheran church during the Nazi revolution.

Lutheranism has always been essentially passive so far as its relations with the state and the development of political and social ideals are concerned. Respect for authority—spiritual, temporal and family—is its very essence.<sup>5</sup> Luther, more-

1. The term "Evangelical" is applied to the Lutheran and Reformed (Calvinist) churches as a unit.

2. *Statistisches Jahrbuch für das deutsche Reich 1933*, Statistisches Reichsamt (Berlin, Reimar Hobbing, 1933), p. 18.

3. *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart (Handwörterbuch für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft)*, 2nd ed. (Mohr Verlag, Tübingen, 1928), Vol. I, p. 1888; Paul B. Means, *Things That Are Caesar's, The Genesis of the German Church Conflict* (New York, The Round Table Press, 1935), p. 5 *et. seq.*

4. Articles 135-141.

5. Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches*, translated from the German, 2 volumes (New York, Macmillan, 1931), Vol. II, p. 540 *et seq.*

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over, made a distinction between private and public morality and regarded the state as "the divinely appointed authority based on reason, whose business it is to execute all the tasks which affect public order and the common weal; by this very fact the State is distinct from the Church, which is dependent solely upon spiritual influence and vital personal fellowship." War, too, is justified by this reasoning.<sup>6-7</sup> The economic thought of Lutheranism was as conservative and authoritarian as its political theories. The masses were discouraged from rising above their "stations in life," for existing conditions were regarded as part of an unchanging divine order.

Although the temporal influence of Lutheranism was apparently in large part responsible for the failure of democratic principles to attain a secure foothold in Germany, the purely spiritual aspects of Lutheran doctrine make it impossible for the Evangelical church to accept National Socialism as a philosophy of life (*Weltanschauung*). For the Lutheran is taught that he must submit to the existing order except when commanded to deny the faith which Luther charged him to confess. It then becomes his duty to resist.<sup>8</sup>

#### THE RELIGION OF NATIONAL SOCIALISM

The official Nazi program declares (Point XXIV) that the party stands for "positive Christianity without binding itself to any particular confession."<sup>9</sup> In his Reichstag speech on March 23, 1933, Chancellor Hitler reiterated the Nazi avowal of "positive Christianity" and promised that the rights of the church would remain unchanged, declaring that the relations of church and state need undergo no alteration. During the intervening years, moreover, the Leader has repeatedly affirmed "positive Christianity." Alfred Rosenberg the supreme overseer of Nazi ideology, further defined the meaning of this phrase in his official commentary on the Nazi program. Rosenberg declares that "the idea which alone is capable of uniting all classes and confessions in the German people is the new and yet ancient *völkisch*<sup>10</sup> ideology, founded on the spirit of the German community which has only [temporarily] been frustrated. This ideology today is National Socialism."<sup>11</sup>

6-7. *Ibid.*, p. 550.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 540.

9. Alfred Rosenberg, *Wesen, Grundsätze und Ziele der NSDAP: Das Programm der Bewegung erweitert durch das Agrarprogramm* (Munich, Volksverlag, 1934).

10. The German word *völkisch* is an untranslatable mystical expression connoting the entire national, racial heritage of Germanism.

Rosenberg's philosophy—or religion—is expounded in his treatise, *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*<sup>12</sup> which, although officially characterized as an expression of the author's personal views, has nevertheless been made required reading for Nazis. In this book Rosenberg sets forth a "religion of blood,"<sup>13</sup> whose fundamental doctrine is the Nordic myth and, above all, the supremacy of Germanic man. He consequently insists that Christianity must be purged of every trace of Jewish influence. "The so-called Old Testament must once and for all be done away with as a religious book. By this act, the unsuccessful attempts during the past 1,500 years to transform us spiritually into Jews will fall to the ground."<sup>14</sup> "The Old Testament stories of immorality and cattle trading will be replaced by the Nordic Sagas and fairy tales, at first simply related, then understood as symbols. Not the dreams of hate and murdering Messiahs but the dream of honor and freedom is what must be kindled by the Nordic, Germanic Sagas. . . . The longing of the Nordic racial soul to give the folkic myths [*Volksmythus*] form as the German church, that is the greatest task of our century."<sup>15</sup> All "Jewish influence and interpretation" in the New Testament, moreover, must be eradicated.

Rosenberg, however, apparently does not wish to discard Christianity entirely but to re-evaluate it in terms of the so-called German race-soul.<sup>16</sup> Thus he rejects the conception of Christ as the "Lamb of God"<sup>17</sup> on the ground that it is Jewish, and denounces the Christian teaching of humility as a gigantic falsification. He declares:

"the prior hypothesis of all German education is recognition of the fact that it was not Christianity which brought morality to us [Germans] but that Christianity owes its lasting values to the German character . . . . The German character values therefore are the absolutes which regulate everything else."<sup>18</sup>

In the heroes of the World War Rosenberg sees the martyrs and saints of a new religious faith, because these men died for the myth of the blood. This myth is as heroic as that of 2000 years ago.

11. Rosenberg, *Wesen, Grundsätze und Ziele der NSDAP*, cited, p. 45.

12. *Der Mythos des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts* (Munich, Hohenstein Verlag, 1930).

13. *Ibid.*, p. 243.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 566.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 575-76.

16. Cf. Paul F. Douglass, *God Among the Germans* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1935), p. 39 *et seq.*

17. Rosenberg, *Der Mythos des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts*, cited, p. 577 *et seq.*

18. *Ibid.*, p. 595.

"The God whom we honor would not exist if our souls and our blood did not exist . . . therefore the task of our religion, of our law, of our State is everything which protects, strengthens, purifies the honor and freedom of this soul."<sup>19</sup>

Much the same ideas are being inculcated in German youth, organized under the leadership of Baldur von Schirach in the *Hitler Jugend* and *Bund deutscher Mädel* (Hitler Youth and Federation of German Girls). Von Schirach's views were expressed in a recent speech<sup>20</sup> to the *Hitler Jugend*:

"Just as today a youth group is assembled in this spot which is neither Catholic nor Evangelical but simply German, so will an entire people eventually stand together; a people which is no longer divided into confessions but is united in belief in its leader and its holy mother earth. It is said that such a goal signifies cutting loose from all religion and we are accused of being Godless, enemies of Divine Providence . . . All of us who stand together in this movement know that we are not here to fight against God, but on the contrary because we believe that we are fulfilling the will of God . . . God has commanded us, that we feel to be an eternal truth: Stand together, fight for Adolf Hitler, fight for our German Fatherland. And if you do this, then you are fulfilling God's will."

The so-called *völkisch* ideas of religion—deification of Germanism and of race—of which National Socialism is in part at least an outgrowth, existed long before the Nazi revolution. Hitler's accession to power, however, brought them to the fore. Among the movements striving for advancement of a German faith<sup>21</sup> was the Tannenberg *Bund* (Federation), inspired by General Ludendorff and his wife, which attacked Christianity on the charge that the Bible is not original and that important elements of Christian doctrine are merely borrowed from Indian sources, while the Gospels are full of elements destructive of culture. Intensely anti-Semitic and anti-Catholic, the *Bund* stressed the importance of race and folkic Germanism. Another group advocating much the same theories was the Hermann Wirth Society, which spread the cult of supremacy of the Nordic race, believing that the origin of all true culture is not the Orient but the North. The same views were shared to some extent by the German Faith Movement—probably the most important of these groups—led by Professor William Hauer. Professor Ernst Bergmann, one of the foremost advocates of the new

religion and closely associated with this movement, summarized the German creed as follows:

"I believe in the God of the German religion who is at work in nature, in the noble Spirit of Man, and in the strength of my people. I believe in the helper-in-need, Christ, who fights for the nobility of man, and in Germany, where the new humanity is being created."<sup>22</sup>

These groups differed from one another in the vehemence with which they denounced various aspects of Christianity, but all deified Germanism.

The year before the Nazi revolution a group calling itself the Religious Movement of German Christians was organized under the leadership of Pastor Hossenfelder of Berlin, a man almost unknown in Evangelical circles. This movement developed rapidly under the protection of the Nazis, and early in 1933 Hossenfelder was recognized by Hitler as the official leader of the German Christians. Although less radical than the out-and-out *völkisch* sects, their aim is to achieve Hitler's "positive Christianity" and eliminate from Evangelical Christianity anything incompatible with Nazism.<sup>23</sup> Their goal is "one people, one leader, one faith," and they believe that

"no German [*deutscher Volksgenosse*] in the Third Reich who pledges himself to a living Christianity can believe otherwise than that the achievement of such a unity of faith is the shining religious goal toward which the German soul is striving."<sup>24</sup>

Although maintaining that "the eternal foundations of our church are the revelations of God as found in Christ's history," the German Christians declare that the Nazi revolution also has brought to the German people new perceptions which are valuable in the life of the church:

"Besides knowledge of the conjunction of race and culture, of race and politics, the conjunction of race and religion has been disclosed to us. With one accord we now see how we are tied in our own life and being to the ancient fundamentals of the beliefs of our fathers."<sup>25</sup>

The Jewish problem is regarded as a racial and not a religious question which must be solved in relation to existing conditions. The German Christians declare that "the [anti-Jewish] measures taken

19. *Ibid.*, p. 656 *et seq.*

20. Text of speech in *Junge Kirche* (Göttingen), November 2, 1935, p. 933 *et seq.*

21. For a detailed account of these movements, cf. Douglass, *God Among the Germans*, cited, p. 47 *et seq.*

22. *Ibid.*, p. 67.

23. Means, *Things That Are Caesar's*, cited, p. 218 *et seq.*; Douglas Reed, "The German Church Conflict," *Foreign Affairs*, April 1935.

24. Dr. Christian Kinder, *Volk vor Gott* (Hamburg, Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, 1935), pp. 23, 18-19.

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 27-28.

by the state and the people naturally apply in the regulation of our church."<sup>26</sup>

#### EFFORTS TO COORDINATE EVANGELICAL CHURCH

After the Hitler revolution, the initial move in pressing coordination of the Evangelical church with National Socialism came from the German Christians, backed by powerful Nazi political leaders. The revolution had been hailed at first by many important Evangelical leaders who, strongly nationalist and conservative in outlook, thought that Hitler had saved Germany from Communism. They believed, too, that godlessness—associated in their minds with Marxism—would now be vigorously suppressed and public morals reformed. For, due to the war, the post-war crisis, and what appeared to many Germans as failure of the church to meet the challenge of a changing world, real religious devotion and church attendance had fallen off among both Catholics and Protestants. Many young people were disillusioned and uninterested in organized religion, despite various religious reform movements.<sup>27</sup>

At a conference held in Berlin on April 3, 1933, the German Christians demanded that the church take a firm stand for the sacredness of race and the limited value of the Old Testament; they pledged themselves in their constitution to war against "atheistic Marxism and ultramontaniam."<sup>28</sup> Pastor Hossenfelder publicly insisted that the Evangelical church must become a single national organization and the existing administration dissolved at once, while the Nazi leader in the Prussian Diet, Kube, backed up Hossenfelder and threatened force if the demands of the German Christians were not instantly complied with.

Thus the first phase of the church conflict seemed primarily concerned with organization: the establishment of a unified Evangelical Reich church under a single leader, paralleling the political unification and centralization of the Reich. The 28 self-governing independent Evangelical churches, partly Lutheran and partly "Reformed" (Calvinist), apparently had nothing against unification as such.<sup>29</sup> The Church Federation<sup>30</sup> therefore directed Dr. Kapler, its lay president, and two eminent theologians to draft a constitution for a unified church.<sup>31</sup> On April 26, 1933 Chancellor

Hitler announced the appointment of Military Chaplain Ludwig Müller—previously little known in church circles—as his representative in all matters affecting the Protestant church. It soon developed that Müller, who suddenly received the full backing of Hitler, was the Nazi choice for Reichbishop. At the end of April he met with the three Evangelical delegates at Loccum in Hanover to assist in drawing up a church constitution.

On May 26, 1933 the Loccum conference announced that the drafting was making progress, that there would be no interference with church doctrine and that a Reichbishop would be elected. The same day, the Church Federation announced that Dr. Friedrich von Bodelschwingh—administrator of the well-known Bethel Inner Mission—was their candidate for the national bishopric.

Immediately a battle began between the church and the German Christians, the latter supported by the Nazi authorities. Müller made a speech over the state-controlled radio, in which he declared that the church leaders had not listened to the "call of the hour"; that the German people wanted a fighter in the struggle for German freedom; that the Storm Troops must hear the Gospel preached in words which left no doubt that Christianity was "an heroic faith."<sup>32</sup> Use of radio and press was open only to the German Christians, and the disorganized opposition thus experienced great difficulty in supporting Dr. von Bodelschwingh.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, resistance to Müller stiffened, despite arrests and dismissals.<sup>34</sup> Dr. Rust, Nazi Minister of Education in Prussia, who had previously assured the church of his neutrality in the conflict, suddenly announced dismissal of the Evangelical expert in his department, who was succeeded by Dr. August Jaeger, a Nazi lawyer. On June 24 Rust made Jaeger commissioner of all the Evangelical churches in Prussia. These moves constituted open interference by the state in the administrative affairs of the church. Jaeger's appointment was hailed by the German Christians, and one of his first acts was to dissolve important church governing bodies in Prussia. This was followed by the resignation of Dr. von Bodelschwingh on the ground that the installation of Jaeger made continuation of his work impossible. German Protestantism was shaken to its depths by these events, and on June 30, 1933 President von Hindenburg intervened, requesting Hitler to attempt settlement of the conflict. The Leader commissioned Reich Minister of the Interior Frick to undertake nego-

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 34-35.

27. Cf. Means, *Things That Are Caesar's*, cited.

28. George N. Shuster, *Like A Mighty Army* (New York, Appleton-Century, 1935), p. 99 *et seq.*

29. Reed, "The German Church Conflict," cited, p. 486.

30. Cf. p. 294.

31. For text of the Church Federation's statement, cf. Means, *Things That Are Caesar's*, cited, p. 222.

32. Reed, "The German Church Conflict," cited, p. 488.

33. Means, *Things That Are Caesar's*, cited, p. 227.

34. Reed, "The German Church Conflict," cited, p. 487.

tiations to this end. Meanwhile, Müller and Jaeger had turned out of office practically the whole personnel of the church administration in Prussia.

Frick established a joint commission representing both parties to the dispute, which actually announced the terms of a new constitution on July 11. The document was officially approved and signed on July 14, and went into force the following day. Its provisions were relatively moderate and did not conform with extreme German Christian demands.<sup>35</sup> The preamble declared that the German Evangelical churches had unified themselves in the hour "when Almighty God has permitted our German nation to undergo a great historical transformation" and that these bodies now formed a German Evangelical Church. Section I, Article 1, however, proclaimed that the inviolable foundation of this church is the "Gospel of Jesus Christ as it has been revealed to us in the Holy Scriptures and newly confirmed in the confessions of the Reformation. Herein the powers which the church requires to fulfill its mission are determined and defined."

Although the constitution does not tamper with religious doctrine, it provides that "at the head of the church stands a Lutheran Reichbishop." In accordance with the Nazi leadership principle, this functionary is "summoned" by the National Synod. He is assisted in his duties by a Religious Ministerial Council—a sort of cabinet—the members of which are appointed by the Reichbishop. The National Synod, on the other hand, is formed of 20 members appointed by the German Evangelical Church "from among those who have distinguished themselves by service in the church," and 40 delegates from the synods and councils of the provincial churches. The latter are made up of "persons chosen by the church members." The Synod must meet once a year but its powers are nominal.

Elections to the synods were announced for July 23, 1933, and the powerful Nazi party machine backed the German Christian candidates. On the eve of the poll Hitler broadcast a speech which made it clear that a vote against the German Christians was equivalent to a vote against himself. The actual polling took place in an atmosphere of intimidation and terror<sup>36</sup> and the outcome was a foregone conclusion, the German Christians obtaining a two-thirds majority in most of the local,

district and national synods. In Prussia, as a result, the Synod of the Old Prussian Union Church (Evangelical) immediately chose Müller as State Bishop of Prussia, and the latter appointed Hosenfelder, leader of the German Christians, Bishop of Brandenburg. The 75 members of the Synod who were not German Christians were proclaimed "traitors" by Bishop Müller and threatened with imprisonment in a concentration camp. The Prussian Synod, moreover, enacted a law excluding from the clergy and from church office all persons who were not "politically reliable" or had Jewish antecedents within two generations. When the National Synod met on September 27, Müller was unanimously chosen Reichbishop.

Meanwhile, the cleavage within the church was growing more pronounced and the opposition was organizing. The situation of non-German Christian pastors was complicated by the fact that most of them sincerely believed Hitler had saved Germany from Communism, awakened the people and restored German national honor. These men also had faith in Hitler's earlier pledge not to interfere in church affairs and consequently thought that attempts to Nazify the church had been undertaken without his knowledge. As time went on, however, these hopes proved unfounded and more and more Christian pastors joined the ranks of the church opposition, although always declaring that they were not hostile to the new state or National Socialism as a political movement. The opposition at first organized a group called "Gospel and Church," which by September 1933 comprised more than 2000 pastors. Their task was seriously hampered by Nazi terror and censorship. In spite of these obstacles, the opposition expanded its organization in October 1933 and renamed it "Pastors' Emergency League." The 3000 members<sup>37</sup> were pledged to defy the authority of Müller and resist government interference with the ministry, especially application of the Aryan paragraph which they contended was contrary to Holy Gospel.<sup>38</sup> The Pastors' Emergency League declared that it "stood unequivocally on the basis of the Holy Scriptures, the Old and New Testaments, as the only law and rule of conduct for our faith and our lives. . . ."<sup>39</sup>

The opposition group was of necessity loosely organized, and its task was made more difficult by the fact that it had no way of convoking its entire

35. For text of the constitution, cf. Werner Hoche, *Die Gesetzgebung des Kabinetts Hitler* (Berlin, Vahlen Verlag, 1933), Vol. III, p. 698 *et seq.*

36. Reed, "The German Church Conflict," cited, p. 490; Shuster, *Like A Mighty Army*, cited, p. 106; Means, *Things That Are Caesar's*, cited, p. 237 *et seq.*

37. *Kreuzzeitung*, November 19, 1933, quoted in *Der Zeitspiegel*, December 3, 1933.

38. Mildred S. Wertheimer, "The Jews in the Third Reich," *Foreign Policy Reports*, October 11, 1933.

39. Manifesto of the Pastors' Emergency League, November 19, 1933. Quoted in *Der Zeitspiegel*, December 3, 1933.

membership. Nevertheless, it put up stiff resistance, aided to some extent by outspoken protests and denunciations of Nazi church policy from foreign Protestants. It was evident that the basis of the conflict had shifted from church organization and administration, and relation between church and state, to the more fundamental problem of religious conviction. This fact was underlined by publication of a series of pamphlets written by Karl Barth, acting on behalf of the Reformed (Calvinist) churches. Professor Barth, recognized as one of the outstanding theologians in Central Europe whose words carried great weight, condemned introduction of the so-called leadership principle in the church, and unequivocally rejected the doctrines of the German Christians, maintaining that the "Evangelical Church ought rather to elect to be thinned down till it be a tiny group and go into the catacombs than to make a compact even covertly with this doctrine."<sup>40</sup>

Despite Barth's influence and the stiffening of organized resistance to Müller and the German Christians, the latter seemed to have achieved fairly complete control of the church. On November 13, 1933 a huge German Christian meeting was held in the Berlin *Sportpalast* commemorating the 450th anniversary of Luther's death. The principal speaker was Dr. Krause, leader of the Berlin German Christian group, who delivered an impassioned address, demanding that church, divine service and doctrine be cleansed of everything "unGerman"—i.e. Jewish—and that the Old Testament with its "Jewish materialism" be eliminated together with the "superstitious portions" of the New Testament. These include the teachings of human brotherhood and humility which must be replaced by a return to "Jesus the hero." Therefore the crucifix, too, must be done away with. "As leaders, we do not need a God enthroned in the dim distance but only a fighter. . . . Worship of heroes must become the worship of God."<sup>41</sup>

Krause's speech aroused consternation throughout the Reich, and as a result Müller was forced to dismiss him from all church offices, publicly stating on November 15 that "such opinions and demands were nothing more than an insupportable attack on the doctrine of the church."<sup>42</sup> The speech, however, was believed to have embodied the real aims of the Nazis, and membership in the Pastors' Emergency League increased to almost 7000. The League demanded that Müller dismiss

Hossenfelder, revoke the anti-Jewish church law and repudiate the German Christian heresies "including the doctrine that nationhood [*Volksstum*], history and contemporary developments should rank with Holy Scripture as a second source of revelation."<sup>43</sup>

Müller, temporarily on the defensive, dropped Hossenfelder and for the time being withdrew his support from the German Christians, but he no longer possessed authority. The Prussian opposition in the Pastors' League was reinforced by adherence of the Lutheran bishops of Bavaria, Baden, Hanover, Hesse and Württemberg. Müller, however, announced that opposition to his administration would be met by immediate suspension, and installed German Christian bishops widely throughout the country. Instead of uniting the church, Müller's methods and measures seemed to increase dissension. On December 8 he declared that the Evangelical youth groups were to be incorporated in the Hitler Youth. This important step placed a large section of German youth under the tutelage of Baldur von Schirach, whose deification of Germanism and repudiation—since retracted—of Christianity have alienated many German parents.

The German Christians, meanwhile, had split up into warring factions as a result of the *Sportpalast* meeting, some of them professing frankly anti-Christian views. The radicals had much in common with the Hauer-Bergmann-Reventlow group, which calls itself the Third Confession, and the doctrines of Rosenberg and von Schirach.<sup>44</sup>

Despite lack of unity within the German Christian and anti-Christian movements, there seemed no doubt that the Nazi régime was determined to support Müller and coordinate the church. Realizing this, the opposition pastors converted their Emergency League into a "Confessional Synod of the German Evangelical Church," which claimed to be the rightful church and which has since led the struggle against Nazification. Meeting at Barmen on May 30, 1934, this group agreed on six "evangelical principles" in refutation of what it regarded as heretical ideas:

"1. Jesus Christ, as He is revealed to us in the Holy Gospel, is the only word of God . . . . The heresy is refuted that the Church can and must recognize in addition to this one word, other events and powers, figures and truths as the revelation of God.

"2. God, through Jesus Christ, claims our whole life. The heresy is refuted that there can be spheres of life in which we do not belong to Him, but to other masters.

40. Karl Barth, *Theological Existence Today; A Plea for Theological Freedom* (translated by R. B. Hoyle; London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1933), p. 45 et seq.

41. *Der Zeitspiegel*, December 3, 1933.

42. For text of Müller's declaration, cf. *ibid.*

43. Reed, "The German Church Conflict," cited, p. 492.

44. Cf. p. 295-96.

"3. The Christian Church is a community of brethren and belongs solely to Christ. The heresy is refuted that the Church can do with its mission and its organization as it likes and surrender it to the vagaries of temporarily prevailing philosophical and political convictions.

"4. The offices of the Church are not there to give one man dominion over another . . . . The heresy is refuted that the Church can and should give itself, or allow itself to be given, leaders endowed with ruling powers.

"5. The Gospel tells us that the State has the divine task of looking after law and order in a world not yet delivered . . . . The heresy is refuted that the State, over and above its special task, should and can become the single and total regulator of human life and thus also fulfill the vocation of the Church. The heresy is also refuted that the Church, above and beyond its own special task, should assume State characteristics, State tasks, and State dignities and thereby itself become an organ of the State.

"6. The mission of the Church . . . consists in the preaching to all people . . . the message of God. The heresy is refuted that the Church can place the word and works of the Lord at the service of any arbitrarily chosen wishes, aims and plans."<sup>45</sup>

This declaration removed any remaining doubts as to the character of the church struggle.

During the summer of 1934 Müller continued his attempted unification. The National Synod (elected in 1933) met for the first time in August and legalized all of Müller's measures, abolished the church flag, completely merged all formerly independent churches with the Reich church, and obliged all pastors and church officials to swear an oath of loyalty jointly to Hitler and the Reich-bishop's administration. This oath, confusing spiritual with worldly issues, presented the opposition with a grave problem, for most of these pastors were politically loyal to Hitler. They took up the challenge, however, and the Brotherhood Council (*Bruderrat*)—the executive of the Confessional Synod—immediately issued a strong protest, stating that "obedience to this [Müller's] church government is disobedience to God." Despite the danger involved—only a few weeks earlier the bloody purge of June 30 had taken place—the manifesto was read in many churches.

Outwardly, however, the church administration had been unified except for the heads of the Bavarian and Württemberg Protestant churches. On September 23, 1934—14 months after his election—Müller was solemnly consecrated as Reichbishop in the presence of all the bishops he had appointed.

45. For text, cf. Henry Smith Leiper, *The Church-State Struggle in Germany* (London, Friends of Europe), No. 21, January 1935, p. 10 *et seq.*

Meanwhile, the struggle continued and for a time the strongest opposition came from South Germany. Bishops Meiser of Bavaria and Wurm of Württemberg refused to recognize incorporation of their churches with the Reich church: as a result Wurm was suspended, there were strong protest meetings in South Germany, more pastors were suspended and the salaries of others stopped, and Wurm was put under house arrest. Dr. Jaeger appeared in Bavaria and, assisted by secret police, retired Bishop Meiser by force. Public indignation among church congregations in Bavaria, however, was so strong against these coercive methods that Jaeger and Müller were forced to back down. Hitler received the protesting bishops on October 30, and is reported to have told them that the Nazi state was not interested in settling problems outside its domain and "would not attempt to arrive at a solution by force."<sup>46</sup>

There followed a period of relative calm during which Reich Minister of the Interior Frick—to whose office Hitler had meanwhile transferred the task of "supervising the church conflict"—attempted to effect a settlement. By April 1935, however, Dr. Frick intimated that no harmony or union was apparent in the Evangelical churches and that the government might have to renounce its position of neutrality. This threat was given reality by the Reich Cabinet's promulgation of a law on June 26, establishing a department or committee (*Beschlussstelle*) for settlement of legal disputes arising out of the church conflict. This body was authorized to decide "whether the measures taken in the Evangelical church since May 1, 1933 are legal or illegal." Its establishment revealed the confusion in the Evangelical church administration, where as a result of the staunch resistance put up by the opposition there have been two church governments. Many of the suspended pastors and church officials, moreover, had sued for damages in the German courts and often won their cases, a fact which embarrassed the Nazi authorities. A semi-official commentary on the new *Beschlussstelle* stated that in its decisions this body is not strictly bound by church regulations or church law precedents. "Formal justice does not need to be recognized at all costs when its application would have absurd consequences."<sup>47</sup>

On July 18, 1935 Hitler appointed Hans Kerrl Reich Minister for Church Affairs with complete authority over both Protestant and Catholic churches, thus in effect dropping Müller despite his continued refusal to resign. The establishment

46. Shuster, *Like A Mighty Army*, cited, p. 160.

47. *Frankfurter Zeitung*, September 29, 1935.

of a special church department with dictatorial powers in the Reich cabinet signified that the Nazi government had decided to bring order out of the chaos in the Evangelical church which had resulted from the Müller régime. Even more important, the new order is expected to be entirely Nazi. Despite numerous recent pronouncements indicating that a coordinated church would be permitted religious freedom, other actions of the government showed that the Nazis had not abandoned their determination, once succinctly expressed by Reichbishop Müller, of not resting "until only National Socialists stood in the pulpits and only National Socialists sat in the pews."<sup>48</sup>

On September 24 the Hitler government promulgated a law stating that "the Reich Minister for Church Affairs is empowered to issue decrees which have the force of law, in order to restore order in the German Evangelical church and in the Evangelical territorial churches (*Landeskirchen*)."<sup>49</sup> This measure was supplemented on October 3 by a decree providing for appointment by Kerrl of a church directorate to assist him. This body was to direct and represent the German Evangelical church, issue decrees regulating internal church affairs, and lay down fundamental principles for church administration. The directorate, in agreement with the Reich Church Minister, appoints and dismisses the officials of the German Evangelical church.<sup>50</sup> Similar directorates were provided for the various territorial churches.

Appointment of the eight members of the Reich Church Directorate was announced on October 14, seven of them being opponents of Müller and the German Christians, and only one representing the latter group. Three of the seven were spokesmen of the Confessional church, three others sympathized with the opposition but had not taken a definite stand, and the seventh was reported to be a neutral who, however, had not supported Nazi church policies. Nevertheless, the Confessional Synod made it clear that its attitude was distinctly reserved, while the Prussian Synod—the largest territorial group in the opposition movement—refused to have anything to do with the directorate, rejecting the state control thus implied and maintaining that the government had no right to appoint such a body.<sup>51</sup>

The fundamental conflict of views persisted, and this fact was underlined by a proclamation of the directorate, issued on October 17, which affirmed the "National Socialist nation—a creation on the

basis of race, blood and soil." On the other hand, it proclaimed Christ as the "Messiah and Savior of all nations and races" and His Gospel as "the inviolable foundation of the German Evangelical church." The purpose of the manifesto, according to Kerrl, was to "establish a clear separation between the fields of politics and religion and still leave to each its rights."<sup>52</sup> Its publication, however, did not reassure those sections of the opposition which had tended to regard Kerrl's conciliatory moves with sympathy.

The friendly motives of the Reich government were further called into question when, during the first week of November, the Nazi secret police closed two new independent theological seminaries organized by the Confessional Synods, expelled professors and students, and sealed the buildings.<sup>53</sup> Thus the church conflict flared up anew and Kerrl openly resorted to extreme dictatorial measures. The Confessional leaders had refused cooperation with him until German Christians were removed and banned from influential positions in the church. Due to this opposition, Kerrl abandoned his previous attitude of benevolent neutrality, and on November 29 the secret police searched the Berlin headquarters of the Confessional Brotherhood and confiscated the funds of the Confessional churches and synods, consisting of voluntary contributions from Protestants throughout the Reich. These moneys were quite separate from the regular church funds, and the action of the secret police—i.e. the government—seems to have had no legal foundation.<sup>54</sup>

Following the government's moves, the Confessional leaders, some of whom had recently favored compromising with the Nazis, were once more reunited in strong opposition. On Sunday, December 1, declarations were read in the churches charging the government with aiding and abetting the introduction of heresy into the teachings of the German Protestant church. The following day, Kerrl issued a decree designed to extirpate the Confessional Synod root and branch. The measure prohibits "church associations or groups" from exercising executive or administrative functions, and forbids them to appoint pastors and other spiritual office-holders, to examine and ordain theological candidates, to make parish inspections, to issue instructions for announcement from the pulpit, to levy and administer church taxes and other moneys, or to issue instructions for collections in connection with parish gatherings and the summoning of synods. Groups or organizations which

48. Reed, "The German Church Conflict," cited, p. 494.

49. *Reichsgesetzblatt*, I, September 28, 1935, p. 1178.

50. Text in *Junge Kirche*, October 19, 1935, pp. 976-77.

51. *New York Times*, October 15, 1935.

52. *Ibid.*, October 18, 1935.

53. *Ibid.*, November 3, 7, 1935.

54. *Ibid.*, November 29, 30, 1935.

continue to exercise these functions may be dissolved. Freedom of preaching in the church and promotion of religious companionship in church associations or groups are declared to be unaffected.<sup>55</sup>

This decree, which if enforced sounds the death knell of the church opposition, was met by open defiance on the part of the Confessional groups. Less than 24 hours after its promulgation, a Confessional Synod leader—who was immediately dismissed and his salary stopped—publicly ordained five theological candidates and preached a sermon in which he stated that “whatever may come, we believe that there will always remain the biblical 7000 who will not bend their knees before false gods.”<sup>56</sup> Opposition has been widespread throughout the Reich, and even threats of high treason charges have not deterred Confessional leaders from preaching and openly declaring their defiance. The Prussian Brotherhood Council (Confessional) has formulated the issue as follows:

“The whole life of our church has been submitted to state administration . . . . The Minister [Kerrl] makes all important decisions . . . in accordance with the political leadership principle. He governs the church as might be expected, according to political considerations . . . . It is a political administration of the church by means of brute force, in the spirit of the German Christians. The Minister has not even left any doubt about ultimate questions of faith. Political gospel has been proclaimed and supported by falsified Bible quotations . . . . A political church is no longer a church of Jesus Christ.”<sup>57</sup>

Dr. Karl Barth stated the issue succinctly when he declared: “Who is to determine the character of the Church? The Church itself or an alien body?”<sup>57a</sup>

#### HITLER AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

National Socialism is in the long run even more irreconcilable with Catholicism than with Protestantism. For the Catholic church represents to its communicants a system of absolute authority which must of necessity conflict with the Nazi goal of a totalitarian state claiming equally absolute authority.<sup>58</sup> Apparently recognizing the inherent strength of the German Catholic church backed by the Holy See in Rome, the Nazis have

not attempted the impossible task of reorganizing the Catholic church in the Third Reich. They have, however, persecuted many individual Catholic leaders—both priests and laymen, killing several prominent Catholics in the June 30 purge—and have tried to discredit the church with the German masses, while doing everything possible to gain control of Catholic youth.

The first round in the Catholic-Nazi struggle was won by the Nazis with the dissolution of the Catholic Center party on July 4, 1933.<sup>59</sup> Although the political influence of the church was exercised through the Center party, the Vatican—apparently considering it expedient to establish a *modus vivendi* with the new Nazi state—consented to a Concordat with the Reich. This document was virtually completed on July 3, 1933—the day before the demise of the Center party—but was not signed until July 20 and did not go into force until September 10.<sup>60</sup> The Concordat sanctioned dissolution of the Center party by forbidding Catholic churchmen to speak or act politically and conceding the right of the state to destroy all Catholic organizations having even a semi-political program. The Hitler government, for its part, pledged itself to establish uniform educational laws throughout the Reich and to permit confessional schools even in districts where they had been forbidden. The Vatican, moreover, secured direct control of university theological professorships, although the state was given the right to question future appointments to episcopal sees. Catholic organizations having a religious objective were recognized as legitimate.

Despite the Concordat, many Catholics were victims of the Nazi terror during the summer of 1933,<sup>61</sup> and as time went on the struggle between the state and the Evangelical church brought out the fundamental issues at stake for all organized religions. Catholic realization of this fact was strongly shown in 1933 by the Advent sermons of Cardinal Faulhaber of Munich, which attracted wide attention both in Germany and abroad. The Cardinal—a recognized authority on the Old Testament—demonstrated that the church is unalterably committed to acknowledging the Old Testament as a revelation, and that Christianity is not conceivable apart from Judaism.<sup>62</sup>

Meanwhile, despite the Concordat, the recognized Catholic organizations, especially the youth

55. *The Times* (London), December 3, 1935.

56. *New York Times*, December 4, 1935.

57. *Ibid.*, December 5, 1935.

57a. Barth, “The German Church,” *The Manchester Guardian Weekly*, January 10, 1936.

58. For an illuminating discussion of both Protestantism and Catholicism in relation to the Nazi state, cf. Paul Tillich, “The Totalitarian State,” *Social Research* (New York), November 1934.

59. Mildred S. Wertheimer, “Political Structure of the Third Reich,” *Foreign Policy Reports*, June 20, 1934.

60. For text of Concordat, cf. Hoche, *Die Gesetzgebung des Kabinetts Hitler*, cited, Vol. IV, p. 515 et seq.

61. Shuster, *Like A Mighty Army*, cited, p. 153 et seq.

62. Cardinal Faulhaber, *Judaism, Christianity and Germany* (translated by G. D. Smith; New York, Macmillan, 1934).

groups, were experiencing grave difficulties, and Catholic publications were censored and suppressed by the Nazis. With the incorporation of the Evangelical youth organizations in the *Hitler Jugend* at the end of 1933, moreover, the Catholic youth organizations were the only ones outside that official association. Members of the Catholic groups were constantly molested by the *Hitler Jugend*, and their activities were curtailed; priests criticizing the Hitler Youth were jailed; by July 1935 Catholic youth organizations were officially forbidden to engage in sport, social or educational activities.<sup>63</sup> The Hitler Youth, moreover, had become more outspokenly anti-Christian, and reports concerning ancient pagan rites at their convocations had become more frequent.<sup>64</sup>

The appointment of Rosenberg as cultural arbiter of the Reich had seriously disturbed the Catholics, and the Pope placed his *Myth of the Twentieth Century* on the index of forbidden books. During 1934 Catholic theologians published comprehensive analyses of the Rosenberg *opus*, demonstrating the fallacies in his historical research and setting forth their conceptions of the true origin of the Bible.<sup>65</sup> Rosenberg answered in a vitriolic pamphlet, defending his work and taking the opportunity further to attack and revile the Catholic church as based on a tissue of lies taken from "Asiatic" and "African" traditions wholly incompatible with nordic German values.<sup>66</sup>

The Catholic conflict with Rosenberg reached a serious stage early in July 1935, when the Bishop of Münster in a pastoral letter protested strongly to the highest Nazi authorities that a forthcoming address to be delivered by Rosenberg in Münster would be an "unbearable provocation" to the Catholic public<sup>67</sup> and an insult to their "most sacred religious convictions." Despite this protest, Rosenberg spoke in Münster and bitterly attacked the bishop, declaring that his letter was tantamount to an attempt to arouse the Catholics against the government. On the following day Minister of the Interior Frick also spoke in Münster and officially repeated Rosenberg's statements. As spokesman of the Reich government, he declared that accord-

ing to the Concordat of 1933 Catholics must consider as binding on them all Reich laws, such as the sterilization measure and foreign exchange regulations. He added that Catholic occupational and youth organizations do not fit into present-day life and are "often active in fields which the Nazi state must reserve for itself." On July 9 Dr. Frick issued a decree providing that any one opposing enforcement of the sterilization law would be prosecuted.<sup>68</sup> The Vatican entered the controversy on July 16, when it dispatched a note to Berlin protesting against alleged violations of the 1933 Concordat, and charging that—contrary to the terms of this Concordat—sterilization measures were being applied to Catholics, there was interference with Catholic lay organizations, and the freedom of the Catholic press in Germany was being attacked.

Despite these protests, Frick issued another decree on July 17 providing "severe punishment for persons spreading propaganda against compulsory sterilization." Then on July 18 General Goering promulgated a far-reaching measure which, he announced, had been sanctioned by Chancellor Hitler. The Goering decree charged the authorities "to employ all their legal weapons against members of the Catholic clergy who falsely employ the authority of their spiritual position for political purposes," and accused the priests of openly denouncing state institutions and measures from the pulpit. While stating that the Nazis "allow the Catholic as well as the Protestant church complete liberty in faith and teaching," the decree reiterated that "politically only one idea of the state exists and is possible in Germany—namely, the National Socialist idea."<sup>69</sup> Herr Kerrl's appointment as Minister for Church Affairs with power over Catholics and Protestants was also announced on July 18.<sup>70</sup>

Even before the July outburst against the Catholics the Nazis had begun prosecution of priests, nuns and monks on charges of smuggling foreign exchange out of the Reich. These trials, accompanied by wide publicity, have since continued; and it is estimated that the total fines imposed on Catholic charitable and monastic orders for such smuggling amount to about 5,000,000 marks.<sup>71</sup> The Nazis have made use of the trials to discredit Catholicism and prove to the German people that Catholic priests and leaders are enemies of the Third Reich.

Thus the Hitler government seems determined

63. *New York Times*, July 27, 1935.

64. *Ibid.*, December 23, 1935.

65. *Studien zum Mythos des XX Jahrhunderts*, published as an official supplement to the *Amtsblatt des Bischöflichen Ordinariats* (Berlin, 1934); *Der Apostel Paul und das Urchristentum, Nachtrag zu den Studien zum Mythos des XX Jahrhunderts*, published as official supplement to the *Kirchliches Amtsblatt für die Diözese Münster*. More than 70 publications denouncing Rosenberg have appeared in Germany.

66. Alfred Rosenberg, *An die Dunkelmänner unserer Zeit, Eine Antwort auf die Angriffe gegen den Mythos des XX Jahrhunderts* (Munich, Hoheneichen Verlag, 1935).

67. Münster is the heart of Catholic Westphalia.

68. *Current History*, September 1935, p. 649.

69. *New York Times*, July 17, 18, 19, 1935; *Frankfurter Zeitung*, July 28, 1935.

70. Cf. p. 300.

71. *New York Times*, November 24, 1935.

to do all in its power to undermine the influence of the Catholic church in Germany. Its determination to abolish Catholic youth, sport and workingmen's societies is at present hampered by the Concordat. Double membership in the Hitler youth and Catholic societies, however, is forbidden. This conflict over control of youth organizations will doubtless be further sharpened by plans announced on January 4, 1936 for conscription of all German boys and girls between 10 and 18 in a Reich Youth League under the leadership of Baldur von Schirach.<sup>71a</sup> Civil servants are already virtually forced to enroll their children in the Hitler Youth;<sup>72</sup> workers must belong to the Labor Front in order to secure or keep their jobs, while Catholic workingmen's groups are denied membership in the Labor Front.<sup>73</sup>

The church, for its part, is fighting to retain control of the education of Catholic youth through confessional schools and the youth organizations; for the right of the clergy to discuss questions of collective ethical import, such as sterilization; and, finally, for immunity of the clergy in the pulpit. It is clear that all of these aims may be—and are—construed by the Nazis as having political implications and furnishing a means of potential opposition to the Third Reich. The Catholics maintain, however, that they merely wish to live to themselves while rendering unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's without mixing in active politics.<sup>74</sup> The situation of the Catholics is perhaps not as dramatic as that of the Protestants, but it is equally serious. The Catholics are absolutely opposed to Nazi sterilization and race laws; the prosecution for the alleged violation of foreign exchange decrees, moreover, virtually constitutes state warfare against the Catholic orders in Germany. And the neo-pagan influence on the Hitler Youth, the difficulties of Catholic schools in Bavaria, besides the virtual suppression of Catholic youth organizations, are regarded not only as a violation of the Concordat but as a dangerous threat to the church.

#### CONCLUSION

The final outcome of the three year struggle for control of the German conscience remains uncertain, despite the Nazis' apparent determination to dominate the Evangelical church and discredit Catholicism, which they cannot subject. The Confessional pastors, however, may be divided into

at least two categories: those like Niemoeller—former submarine commander—and Jacobi, and many others who are willing to become martyrs for their faith; and a large body of less radical men, headed by Bishop Marahrens of Hanover, who still hope that some compromise may be possible. There is also a big group of neutral pastors who have not actively participated in the controversy and who would probably adjust themselves to any settlement. The once powerful German Christians, for their part, seem to be disintegrating and—reminiscent of German political history—there are now reported to be more than two dozen different religious sects among the Nazis. These range from out-and-out anti-Christians to moderates who still believe that Christianity and Nazism can be reconciled by divorcing the former from Judaism. It is impossible to estimate the strength of these forces, but one factor stands out clearly in the complicated situation: the Hitler government is determined to control organized religion. Its final goal is undoubtedly one people, one Reich, one faith—based on the doctrine of blood, race, soil and deification of the state.

Dissemination of this faith proceeds unceasingly through radio, press and assembly. German youth in the *Hitler Jugend*, to which all young people who hope for future employment must belong, is being constantly indoctrinated with these principles. The relation between the state and the National Socialist party, moreover, makes it possible at times for the latter to take more extreme measures than the state when for reasons of policy, either domestic or foreign, the government may not care to seem identified with or responsible for radical measures. Hitler declared in his final address to the Nuremberg party convention on September 16, 1935 that the National Socialist movement (the party) is the guarantor of the ideological course of the state and must therefore provide the leadership for the nation while at the same time educating the people.

"The party," he added, "must be forever an always newly procreative cell for our National Socialist *Weltanschauung*. The movement must intervene in the state apparatus and admonish and correct if it is to discharge the full measure of its task. The movement alone possesses the absolute right so to act."<sup>75</sup>

The conclusion to be drawn from Hitler's statement must be that the party—and especially Rosenberg and von Schirach as leaders in ideological education—will become ever more active in the indoctrination of the primacy of blood, race and soil.

75. *Voelkischer Beobachter*, September 17, 1935.

71a. *Ibid.*, January 5, 1936.

72. Cf. *The Times* (London), November 19, 1935 for court action upholding this principle.

73. *New York Times*, December 1, 1935.

74. Pr. J. Muenzer, "Ce que veulent les Catholiques," *Revue des Vivants*, October 1935, p. 1507 et seq.